PB-218 256

CLEANER WATER FOR THE OHIO

Public Health Service
Washington, D. C.

1952

DISTRIBUTED BY:

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National Technical Information Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield Va. 22151

PB 218 256

CLEANER WATER | *for the Ohio*

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Till taught by pain
Men really know not what good water's worth. Byron.

Cleaner Water for the Ohio

There was a time in this country when it was safe to drink right out of almost any stream. That time is gone.

There was a time also when our rivers could carry off our sewage and factory waste and still perform their many other daily tasks for us. For many rivers, that time too is gone.

Cities and industries have grown so fast, and wastes from them have mounted so tremendously, that many of our streams are badly polluted.

Our own Ohio River is no exception. It is one of the worst in the country.

The reason is, of course, that our river serves one of the most heavily populated and industrialized regions in the United States. We who make our living in the Ohio Valley number nearly 18 million—about 12 percent of the United States population—and our industries produce 15 percent of the Nation's manufactured goods. The more cities and industry in an area, the more waste to be disposed of.

A Way Out

We do not need to sacrifice the beauty and usefulness of our waters to the demands of modern living. Waste treatment plants lessen or eliminate the damage done by polluting wastes. But we do not have nearly enough of these plants in operation. A study of the pollution situation in the Ohio River drainage basin has recently been made by State, Interstate, and Federal agencies. It shows that of all the people in the Valley who live in communities

served by sewers, only about one-third are served by sewage treatment plants. Many of these are inadequate. Sewage and other wastes from the rest are not treated at all.

The study also reveals that our industry's record for treating waste is no better than that of our cities. It states:

"Considering only those industries for which an estimate of organic waste load is available, about 76 percent of the organic waste load is discharged to the streams untreated and much of the treated waste requires additional treatment."

Serious Problems

About 6½ million people—nearly three-fourths of those served by public water supplies—use river water. Only extreme care in operating our water purification plants make it possible to safely drink, bathe, and cook with river water.

Safety of water supply is only one of our problems. Elimination of bad tastes and foul odors in water caused by many kinds of wastes calls for utmost operating skill. Even then we are often only partially successful.

Next to domestic use, industrial use of water is most essential to us making a living in the Ohio Valley. Our great steel works, metal-fabricating plants and other factories cannot function without good water.

The acid which drains into streams from active and abandoned coal mines, according to the report, "is the greatest single pollution

Industry and the River

problem in the basin and constitutes the greatest unknown with respect to satisfactory and economical means for control and abatement." With less than 10 percent of our coal reserves tapped, we can expect more acid as more coal is mined, unless present controls are maintained and additional action is taken.

The Ohio and its branches also bear large loads of silt. This presents a long-time challenge for soil conservationists, farmers, and others—an effort that will require full public support.

What Price Clean Water?

Aside from the coal acid and silt pollution, what would be the bill for abating pollution in the Ohio? How much would it cost us to install the plants needed to treat domestic and industrial wastes before they are emptied into the river and its branches?

The cost per capita for municipal treatment plants varies, depending on the degree of treatment and other factors. On the average, the required charge to amortize the construction cost of new treatment plants needed in the Ohio River Basin is estimated at less than 1 cent per day for each person served.

Total costs for industrial waste treatment are difficult to estimate.

But the cost added to the final product—in the end the amount paid by the individual consumer—is insignificant in most cases. One steel mill reports waste-treatment costs of only about 50 cents a ton of steel.

Are these small amounts too much to pay for abating an evil that endangers health and life, increases the cost of industrial production (sometimes to the point of driving away factories to cleaner water elsewhere), kills fish and wildlife, damages recreational areas, impairs agricultural use and property values, corrodes navigation structures, and makes life generally less pleasant for all?

Specifically

How do we stand on pollution in the Ohio River Basin?

In size, 10 cities in our basin rank among the Nation's first 100: Pittsburgh, twelfth; Cincinnati, eighteenth; Indianapolis, twenty-third; Columbus, twenty-eighth; Louisville, thirtieth; Dayton, forty-fourth; Nashville, fifty-sixth; Youngstown, fifty-seventh; Canton, eighty-seventh; and Evansville, ninety-fourth.

Pittsburgh, first ranking city in our area, does not treat its sewage and other waste. Neither does Cincinnati, second largest in the area. Nor does Louisville, Nashville, Youngstown, or Evansville.

In short, 6 of our 10 largest cities dump untreated sewage and other wastes into the river.

And the other four? All have treatment plants but, according to the report, all needed enlargement or replacement to handle the increasing loads.

But medium size cities represent the majority of our urban population. What about them? Numerically, we have at least 400 cities over 2,500 population that require treatment plants or improvements.

And Industry?

On the main stem of the Ohio, only 14 of the 71 steel works and metal-fabrication plants, and 13 of the 33 food product manufacturing establishments—to cite two types of industry—are known to treat their waste before discharge.

The organic industrial wastes which enter the Wabash River

at Terre Haute is equivalent to sewage from more than 500,000 people.

Up and down the Miami River 21 paper plants discharge organic waste—and the waste from just one of these plants equals that from 140,000 people.

At Nashville, on the Cumberland River, a single packing plant pours out organic wastes equivalent to that from 135,000 people.

Wastes from chemical plants in the Charleston area and steel mills around Youngstown, together with domestic sewage, make the Kanawha and Mahoning Rivers little more than open sewers.

Action—But Not Enough

What are we doing about these and other sore spots?

Pittsburgh now has a plant on paper. Cincinnati and Evansville are actually building. Columbus, Dayton, and Indianapolis are enlarging; Canton is replacing its old inadequate plant. Several smaller cities also are building, many are planning, and others have been ordered to by the States. And many factories are installing treatment plants, while others are changing manufacturing processes to cut down waste.

All of the States in the basin have stepped up their pollution-control programs and eight of the States have joined together in the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Compact, thus making possible greater unified action.

All of us who live in the Ohio Valley are neighbors, sharing the rich heritage of our water resources. We are beginning to recognize that as neighbors we have the responsibility of preserving and restoring this heritage. With cities, industry, antipollution agencies, and citizens working together, we are making progress—but not enough. We have not kept pace with municipal and industrial growth. We have to move faster, and do more.

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Publication of the—

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Public Health Service

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Cover photograph—Paul Briel

Public Health Service Publication No. 203

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1952 2@714

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